

House International Relations and Economic Development Committee  
86<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature  
Interim Charge 5 Request for Information

**Response from Texas Workforce Commission**

**Interim Charge 5:** Review the connection between the economic vitality of business and industry and the economic vitality of our military veterans transitioning into the workforce. Specifically, the committee should analyze barriers to military veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life, the effectiveness of government transition and training benefits, and current and ongoing demand for veteran and military spouse employment from industry in Texas. *(Joint charge with the House Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs)*

**Veterans Unemployment**

The unemployment rate for Veterans in Texas for the 12 months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic ranged from 3.2% to 3.7%. Steadily increasing since March 2020, the June 2020 labor market statistical data reflected the veteran unemployment rate at 4.3%. The nonveteran unemployment rate was 5.5%. The data source for the unemployment rates listed above is the Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) Labor Market and Career Information Department. The unemployment rates reflect a 12-month average.

**Transition Resources**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the delivery of the Transition Assistance Program to transitioning service members. Most transitioning service members are completing their requirements by attending online training and receiving services virtually from transition center counselors, TWC staff, and Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) staff. Transitioning service members are also experiencing longer wait times for the movement of their household and personal items to the location they are relocating to upon completion of their military service.

Military branches offer multiple training and internship programs for transitioning service members, including online offerings. Programs such as the U.S. Department of Defense Skillsbridge program and internship programs are examples where transitioning service members can seek out training and employment as Automotive Service Technicians, Project Management Professionals, Lean Six Sigma Practitioners, Computer Network Support Specialists, and Law Enforcement Officers.

Federal legislation was signed into law that allows that the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs to pay a veteran's full monthly housing allowance under the Post-9/11 GI Bill beneficiaries, if classes move online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Post-9/11 GI Bill continues to expand and provide benefits for the following types of programs:

- Undergraduate and graduate degrees
- Vocational, technical training and non-college degree programs
- On-the job training and apprenticeships
- Entrepreneurship training
- Flight training
- Test fees (reimbursement)

TWC is one of the 22 state agencies that comprise the Texas Coordinating Council for Veteran Services (TCCVS), chaired by TVC. TWC's Texas Veterans Leadership Program (TVLP) and Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR) staff members participate in the 10 different workgroups that focus on specific policy areas affecting veterans, service members, and their families. The workgroups identify unmet needs, provide background information, and make recommendations in a report to the TCCVS.

The TCCVS approves and submits the report to the Texas Legislature before each legislative session, with the next submission date being October 1, 2020. Currently, TVLP and VR staff have participated heavily in the employment workgroup. This workgroup identified that over the past couple of legislative sessions, numerous bills were passed related to occupational licensing for military service members, military spouses, and veterans. They observed that finding information on which state agency regulated the different occupational licenses was extremely difficult and fragmented. The employment workgroup provided a recommendation to the TCCVS that would create a webpage on the Texas Veterans Portal listing all the licensing bodies and the occupations they license and requiring the licensing bodies to provide a direct link to their website outlining their licensing process.

### **Texas Workforce Commission and Community Partners**

TWC oversees a service delivery system comprising 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) that administer services in more than 180 Texas Workforce Solutions offices across the state. TWC provides employment assistance, education, and training to individuals who are seeking employment. TWC collaborates with community and technical colleges and trains providers across the state to train veterans and other eligible individuals in target and in-demand occupations. Although services are available to the public, TWC has specific statutory direction to provide priority of service to veterans. This priority of service requirement is established in Texas Labor Code §302. During FY 2018, TWC served over 39,800 veterans and other eligible persons through these programs.

TVC also provides 164 Veterans Employment Representatives in 89 locations across Texas, including Workforce Solutions offices, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) centers, American GI Forum programs, military installations, and state institutions of higher education. TWC, TVC, and the 28 Boards work collaboratively to coordinate and deliver employment and other support services to all veteran job seekers and their families.

### **WorkInTexas.com**

WorkInTexas.com is the state labor exchange/job matching system implemented by TWC in June 2004. WorkInTexas.com provides a few special features to/for veterans and employers, including:

- A two-day hold on all newly created job postings – these jobs are available only to veterans the first 2 days they are available to ensure veterans get first review.
- The ability for employers to designate their jobs for Veteran Applicants Only.
- Notice to all veteran job seekers upon registration with WorkInTexas.com that they are entitled to priority of service.
- Icons to identify veteran job seekers to employers.
- Customized messages (Bulletins) to help keep users aware of changes to system functionality and/or relevant recruiting and requirement changes (for example, recent federal regulatory changes for Federal Contractors regarding job postings).

**WorkInTexas-Veterans.jobs** is a search-engine optimized website that contains all veteran-friendly jobs found in WorkInTexas.com, ensuring that veterans using search engines as their job search tool can still easily find state labor exchange job content.

### **Texas Veterans Leadership Program**

The Texas Veterans Leadership Program (TVLP), established in 2008, is a resource and referral network for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan who are transitioning back into civilian life. TVLP employs 17 Veterans Resource and Referral Specialists (VRRSs) across the state, in addition to three individuals who work at the Transition Centers on military installations. These Transition Center individuals outreach veterans and transitioning service members to ensure that they are directed to any help they need in order to eventually return to work. This program puts special attention on those individuals facing specific or complex challenges as they reintegrate into the workforce.

All VRRSs are Iraq or Afghanistan service members, so they understand the unique needs these individuals are facing. Since July 2008, TVLP has contacted over 38,300 veterans to provide services helping them gain any needed support services and to reengage in employment. Although not the primary focus, TVLP also assists other non-Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, if assistance is requested.

### **Texas Operation Welcome Home**

On March 7, 2016, Governor Abbott established the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative to assess local economic activities, examine workforce challenges and opportunities, and consider innovative approaches to meeting the state's workforce goals. Included in the Tri-Agency's charge was an evaluation of gaps in services to Texas veterans.

The Texas Operation Welcome Home program was developed by the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative, in conjunction with the 28 Boards, TVC, and military installations that include nine active duty, two reserves, and one National Guard. The program is designed to better meet the education, training, and employment needs of transitioning service members, recently separated veterans, and military spouses in Texas.

Below are a few of the components of Texas Operation Welcome Home:

- The **Welcome Home Texas Transition Alliance** is a group of stakeholders who meets periodically, with the next meeting tentatively scheduled for September 2020. The group discusses best practices, cross training on one another's programs, collaboration on addressing the needs of transitioning service members, and facilitating ongoing coordination to improve employment outcomes. The Welcome Home Texas Transition Alliance stakeholders include key staff from TWC, TVLP, TVC, Military Transition Center Managers, Garrison/Base Commanders, employers, employer associations, designated Boards, and Workforce Solutions offices. One of the best practices that has been implemented is that military installations conduct a needs assessment of transitioning service members and military spouses. The needs assessment has highlighted the types of training, certifications, or licensure transitioning that service members and military spouses are seeking. The assessment has also identified gaps in services for the Texas workforce system partners to address the use of resources.
- The **We Hire Vets Campaign** is an employer recognition program that recognizes Texas employers for their commitment to hiring veterans. Employers whose workforces are composed of at least 10% military veterans are eligible to receive a "We Hire Vets" employer recognition decal to display on their storefronts and an electronic decal to display on their websites. Employers that qualify for the We Hire Vets program also receive a letter signed by the Chair of TWC's three-member Commission and the Chair of TVC. Sponsored by TWC and TVC, We Hire Vets has issued 646 We Hire Vets decals and letters to Texas employers in the past 3 years. During local Texas Business Conferences throughout the state, TWC Commissioner Aaron

Demerson recognizes all employers that participate in the We Hire Vets program. Several We Hire Vets ceremonies have been conducted in cities across the state, including El Paso, Killeen, and Houston.

- The **Military Family Support Program** provides military spouses with enhanced job search assistance, assessment of skills, labor market information, résumé writing, and interview skills. If funding is available, military spouses can receive certification or licensure training in targeted occupations. The Military Family Support Program has been funded for three years, with a \$1 million allocation per fiscal year. Currently, there are eight military installations throughout the state that have signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with their respective local Board to participate in the program. Since 2017, the Military Family Support Program has connected more than 600 military spouses to enhanced employment services, enrolled 140 military spouses in certification training, and connected 144 military spouses to employment.
- The **Skills for Transition Program** operated 2018-2020 with funds made available through the Skills Development Fund and awarded to local community colleges working in partnership with local Workforce Solutions offices and local military installations. The community colleges provided transitioning veterans access to training in demand occupations such as Heavy Equipment Operator, Computer Network Support Specialist, Network Computer Systems Administrator, Automotive Service Technician, Pharmacy Technician, and others. Since 2018, 473 transitioning service members enrolled in the program.

### **College Credit for Heroes**

The College Credit for Heroes (CCH) program is a partnership among TWC, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and Texas colleges and universities. The primary goal of the program is to maximize college credit awarded to veterans and transitioning service members (TSMs) for their military experience, education, and training. The program seeks to maximize college credits awarded to veterans and service members for their military experience in order to expedite their transition into the Texas workforce. The program's goal is to eliminate obstacles to attaining licensing, certification and accreditation, and degree awards at state and national levels so veterans can transition more quickly from college classrooms to the workforce. Since 2011, over 25,000 official transcripts have been issued as a result of this initiative.

House Bill 493, passed by the 85<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature, Regular Session, required TWC, in consultation with THECB, to report the number of academic credit hours awarded under the program and applied toward a degree or certification program at an institution of higher education during the most recent academic year. The CCH program is a robust network of schools with a majority relying on localized evaluation and credit programs. Of the 20 institutions providing HB 493 survey data, 10 have completed local evaluations and the remainder are in various stages of development of local tools and processes for evaluating military experience for credit.

Data gathered for the 2019 CCH report indicates that, for the 2017-2018 academic year, a veteran was awarded an average of 14.3 credit hours by the institution of their choice. This average represents a significant increase over the 2016-2017 academic year, in which the average was 3.6 credit hours awarded per veteran. Data also indicates the number of credits transferred per veteran increased from 1.2 to 2.9 during that same time.

A new College Credit for Heroes Capacity Building grant will last for a period of two years with goals to:

- Develop and document a pilot military transcript evaluation process that will ensure that credits are awarded consistently to all veterans and active duty service members submitting military transcripts for 10 common military courses, military experience, and/or training.
- Develop a sustainable tracking method for students participating in the CCH program to accurately gauge the benefits they are receiving and confirm that processes and policies are being implemented consistently among participating colleges.
- Recruit champions from the current students, alumni, and faculty who are or have participated in the CCH program to act as advocates and resources regarding the CCH program.
- Integrate CCH program information into veteran or active duty service member targeted outreach plans.

TWC and THECB will develop a website listing course equivalencies to be reported under CCH to be available for veterans and service members. Once the website is complete, the interface will be accessible to Texas CCH partnering institution representatives to add or modify equivalencies and applicable academic programs. This allows veterans to compare multiple institutions and determine their best option for enrolling in a postsecondary degree program. TWC will ask each institution to link to the website from their institutional websites.

#### **Red, White, and You Veteran Job Fair**

TWC hosted the 8<sup>th</sup> annual statewide Hiring Red, White and You! (HRWY) job fair on November 7, 2019 in cooperation with the 28 Boards, TVC, the Texas Medical Center, and Governor Greg Abbott. Over 14,450 job seekers and over 2,225 employers attended the statewide job fairs in 2019. Since 2011, Hiring Red, White and You has connected more than 98,600 job seekers, including 38,925 veterans and spouses, along with 16,650 employers and over 2,700 same-day hires. The 9<sup>th</sup> annual Hiring Red, White, and You Veteran statewide hiring event is scheduled to be held on November 5, 2020. Multiple events will be held through virtual platforms throughout the state, with certain in-person services and resources also available at some sites.

The American Legion has also partnered with TWC and TVC for a statewide virtual Veteran Job Fair on September 15, 2020. This job fair is free to all employers, transitioning service members, National Guard, Reservists, veterans, and their families.

#### **Veterans Workforce Outreach Initiative**

TWC conducted a competitive procurement process to solicit applications for the provision of services for hard-to-serve veterans who have one or more barriers to employment, such as homelessness; a history of substance abuse; physical, mental, or learning disabilities; post-traumatic stress disorder; ex-offender status; or recent discharge from military duty. American GI Forum was awarded, and the program was implemented in San Antonio, Houston, the Dallas/Fort Worth metro area, and El Paso.

The Veterans Outreach project is designed to outreach hard-to-serve veterans who are not currently being served through Workforce Solutions offices, addressing employment barriers faced by hard-to-serve veterans, and reintegrating hard-to-serve veterans into meaningful employment.

Employment barriers are addressed, and resources are accessed to overcome barriers under the guidance of a case manager. Veterans benefit from a range of services that may include assessments; job development and job placement; case management and support services, such as transportation; rent and utility assistance; mental health assistance, including clinical counseling; wheelchairs, crutches, and medical beds; food assistance; and financial assistance.

From February 2019 to January 2020, the Veterans Outreach project provided 421 individual veterans with assessment services, enrolling 335 into the program. Of those enrolled, 182 were placed into employment with an average wage rate of \$14.89 per hour.